

Remarks of
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Before the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24, Section 28
Teacher Certification Requirements, Teacher Evaluation

February 21, 2012

Good afternoon, Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Valerie Lofland and I am a teacher in Naugatuck. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 23 Section 28, Certification Requirements. In addition to being a certified Connecticut teacher with multiple endorsements I am also a retired Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force and head of the Air Force Junior ROTC program at Naugatuck High School. I am here today to bring to light what I consider important standards in teacher education with regards to the need to have all Connecticut teachers pursue a graduate degree. I would like to highlight the Air Force requirement for graduate education because I believe there are important parallels here. Having spent twenty-five years in the Air Force as a career officer, I speak from experience. Although I am not an official spokesperson for the Air Force, my branch of service made the requirement to have advanced education part of their promotion policy and recommended that officers obtain either a Master's degree, or professional degree as an important facet of officer promotion to the senior ranks. During my career I was required to continually improve my writing, critical thinking skills and my ability to draft important reports and analyses that were frequently sent to high headquarters. At times these reports became a part of important Congressional testimonies. During the past decade the Air Force realized how the need for a graduate degree was crucial for our officers to have the skills to meet these challenges. Higher headquarters acknowledged that a bachelor's degree was insufficient for officer development and senior leadership positions. This policy change went into effect in 2011 and officers now who do not obtain an advanced degree may find a difference in promotion opportunities to the higher ranks such as Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel and eventually to the general officer ranks.

Today 75 percent of majors, 96 percent of lieutenant colonels and virtually all colonels have advanced degrees according to the Air Force Personnel Center. If an officer is not working toward a master's degree it could spell trouble on future promotions in the officer corps. I made it my goal to obtain the highest degree I could achieve, which was a PhD, and this allowed me to enhance my career assignment options and promotion opportunities.

Having advanced degrees has contributed significantly to my ability to teach my students and I believe this is crucial in our education system today. As a result of advancing my education, I am better able to help my students develop their critical thinking and writing skills and to understand complex problem which are the tools they will need to succeed in college or the work force when they graduate.

My advanced degrees have allowed me to become a skillful writer and thinker, and I am better able to create meaningful lesson plans and develop project-based assessments to use in my classes on a daily basis. Finally, as a teacher I write many letters of recommendation for college and scholarship application packages and my writing ability has been crucial when documenting and highlighting a student's individual achievements to make their applications stand out. In closing, I encourage this committee to reject the proposals in SB 24, Section 28 and maintain the requirement for all educators to hold an advanced degree, so that they are better prepared to meet the changing needs of students.